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ABSTRACT

This document contains the proceedings of a conference on family literacy that was attended by representatives of community-based literacy and family literacy programs in Newfoundland and Labrador. The document begins with an executive summary of the conference activities. The texts of the following keynote addresses are presented: "A Thousand Cups of Tea" (Mary Gordon); "The Basic Skills Agency" (Elizabeth Hanson); and "Roots of Empathy" (Mary Gordon). The conference workshops, which dealt with the following topics, are summarized: extending families; supporting family literacy through community-based programs; development of a strategic literacy plan; early brain development and literacy; early intervention and the role of the reading specialist; overcoming barriers through innovative literacy practices; reading as a family affair; strategic literacy funding; Canada's National Adult Literacy Database; building community capacity through intergenerational learning; parent involvement in lifelong learning; and factors underlying successful literacy programs. Presented next is a summary of the final plenary session, during which participants split into four groups and examined the question of how to further develop family literacy in the Province of Newfoundland. Concluding the document are results of the conference evaluation, a list of conference publications, the publication distribution list, and a list of conference participants. (MN)

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Gathering Voices:

Building an Alliance for Family Literacy

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PROCEEDINGS

October 26-28, 2000

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Gathering Voices:

Building an Alliance for Family Literacy

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October 26-28, 2000

Edited by Angela Drake and
Kay Anonsen

The conference was funded by the National Literacy Secretariat, Human Resources Development Canada with support from The Literacy Development Council of Newfoundland and Labrador and the Department of Education.

Human Resources Development Canada

Developpement des resources humaines Canada

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Executive Summary

In 1999, 15 individuals from Newfoundland and Labrador, including representatives from community-based literacy and family literacy programs, the school system and literacy development agencies, attended the Atlantic Canada Family Literacy Institute in Prince Edward Island. At that session, provincial delegates agreed to continue to collaborate. A provincial conference and two publications are the results of their efforts.

Over 195 people attended the conference "Gathering Voices: Building an Alliance for Family Literacy" held October 26 – 28, 2000, at the Battery Hotel in St. John's. The conference attracted participants from literacy development programs, family resource centres, daycare centres, Health and Community Services, schools and school boards, the Department of Education and parents.

Over the three days, events included a PreConference Workshop "Roots of Empathy", two Keynote addresses (Mary Gordon and Elizabeth Hanson), 12 workshops, the launch of two publications, and exhibits displaying programs and resources.

Mary Gordon has been developing school-based Family Literacy and parenting programs since the early 1980s, and currently administrates Parenting and Family Literacy Programs with the Toronto District School Board. Her passion is helping children learn and succeed in life and one of the ways she does that is through a program she designed called Roots of Empathy. It is a classroom based parenting course – for children. The main goal of the program is to develop empathy in children. The philosophy that guides the program is that, with empathy for themselves and others, children will be more able to develop to their full potential as complete human beings, and less likely to be cruel.

In her keynote address Mary talked about how working with families is the most effective way of raising literacy levels. We have to help our children feel that they can do it and want to do it. That doesn't come from teachers in classrooms, it comes from the loving relationships that exist in the home. Our role is to help those relationships. We need to be advocates for families and we need to help families advocate for themselves. We have the strength and communication processes but do we have the will? It means more work, more meetings, more convincing of more bureaucrats, and the loosening of more pocketbooks.

Elizabeth Hanson is Assistant Director at the Basic Skills Agency, which is the national development agency for literacy and numeracy in England and Wales. She talked about how the Agency carries out its mission to help raise standards of basic skills in England and Wales. They define basic skills narrowly, as those required to participate as a citizen: the ability to read, write and speak in English, and use mathematics at a level necessary to function and progress at work and in society in general.

The Agency works by invitation from bodies that have an interest in developing basic skills programs, including schools, colleges, training providers, local and regional government bodies, and community health and housing organizations. Family Literacy

programs have only three aims, which are to improve the literacy of parents, to improve parents' ability to help their children, and to improve children's acquisition of reading and writing skills. The emphasis is on developing literacy, and parenting is supported as a context for the literacy learning.

Participants were offered a choice of concurrent workshops examining Family Literacy policies and research, as well as a review of Family Literacy initiatives and practices in Newfoundland. Twelve workshops were led by twenty-nine presenters from a variety of programs and backgrounds. Some workshops offered an opportunity to get information on a particular subject or agency such as the National Adult Literacy Database, literacy funding, early brain development, or the provincial government's Strategic Literacy Plan. Others looked at broader themes of building community capacity, lifelong learning or factors underlying successful family literacy programs. From how to innovate to meet your community's needs to pondering the role of the reading specialist the workshops addressed a diversity of topics to cater to both experienced or new practitioners/advocates in the field of family literacy.

In the final plenary participants discussed how to further the development of family literacy in the province. They talked about the need for more funding both from government and private sources. Those community groups, families and individuals interested in participating in literacy development programs need access to information about available programs and resources. Suggestions included a provincial website, a directory of literacy programs and an annual gathering to network, to share information and to continue to build a strong alliance for family literacy.

It was agreed that a new steering committee would be established to create a three year plan for a Family Learning Alliance. People interested in serving on this committee, or suggesting someone to serve on this committee, are asked to contact the Literacy Development Council of Newfoundland and Labrador (LDC-NF/LB). Copies of the conference report will be sent to all the conference participants and additional copies can be requested from the LDC-NF/LB.

The Conference Steering Committee also oversaw the writing and publication of a booklet "Little Steps: Pathways to Life Long Learning" and a brochure on Family Literacy Programs in Newfoundland and Labrador. The two publications were launched at the conference and distributed to family literacy organizations across the province. Contact local literacy organizations or the LDC-NF/LB for copies of these.

Conference Planning Team

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Keynote Address: Mary Gordon

A Thousand Cups of Tea

Bio: Mary Gordon has been developing school-based Family Literacy and parenting programs since the early 1980s, and currently administrates Parenting and Family Literacy Programs with the Toronto District School Board. Her classroom-based parenting course, Roots of Empathy, is used throughout the country, and her models and programs have received international recognition.

Family Literacy

Family literacy is the beginning of lifelong literacy. It is the ground zero against which children measure everything else in their lives. Working with families is the most effective way of raising literacy levels. By doing this, we prepare rather than repair. School systems are frantically in repair mode because we haven't prepared children and families. We haven't recognized at a visceral level that it is the family who gives children the attitude; 'I think I can, I think I can'. And without that 'little engine' attitude, those little engines have an uphill battle all their lives. We have to help our children feel that they can do it and want to do it. That doesn't come from teachers in classrooms, it comes from the loving relationships that exist in the home. Our role is to help those relationships. It will take a thousand cups of tea to reach many of our families but that tea will sweeten life.

The experiences of children in the earliest years of life are more predictive of their success than all of the things that we do in the interim, so it's important to get it right from the beginning. The family literacy movement gives us insights into how to help families steer their children. We do this work because families care, more than anybody else, about their children. The family is the absolute cell, the core building block of society, and significant change happens through them.

Family literacy is not about instruction per se. It's about helping families positively influence their children's outcomes with literacy. Our most vulnerable children are the children who live in poverty and those are the families most difficult to reach. If you push a vulnerable family too hard though, you lose them and they don't come back. Children have to show up in schools; families don't have to do anything. If they are social-worked rather than empowered, they won't come back.

Government Policy and Family Literacy

You don't hear the word 'caring' in social policy issues but caring is basic to any society. If we don't care, it's going to be difficult to create social policies that have any real significance.

It is unconscionable in a country with the richness of Canada that there is one child who goes to bed hungry, or one family that cannot buy a book for their child, or one family so

exhausted from providing for their children that they don't have the energy to listen to them or speak with them. We need to hear our children's dreams. Children who don't have anyone to listen to their dreams stop dreaming.

The combining of the knowledge of neuroscience and early childhood education has given us all the ammunition we need to convince policy-makers to empower families and support schools. Children who do not receive adequate nutrition, nurturance and stimulation are disadvantaged for life. Children who don't have the opportunity to form loving, trusting attachments in the early years are forever damaged. Why would we ever allow that to happen to any child? Why would we not help and support the family so they are able to be loving and attentive?

It used to be that one third of mothers worked when they had pre-schoolers and now that has increased to two thirds. Still, we haven't done anything to change our supports for the care of those children. It's not that life should be perfect, but there should be somebody or some system to catch those that fall through our fragmented social net. If we don't plan for that, we might as well start building expansions on our jails.

We are seeing an unprecedented convergence of cross-sectoral interest in young children. What we need to do in literacy is jump on that bandwagon. We need to pull in all the players who have suddenly realized that the get-go of children has everything to do with the economic get-go of countries.

The World Bank is talking about investment in early childhood development and parenting capacity because 'building brain capacity builds economic capacity in civilizations'. This sounds distasteful but it speaks the language of those who have power and money and influence. They are also fathers and grandfathers and we need to open their eyes to the plight and potential of children.

However, we have to be careful what we ask for and what we will accept. You can't sign up for a ten-week training program of something or other and think it's going to change your life. We're talking about lifetime investment. We're talking about setting up systems of support that families can choose to opt into and out of whenever they want to. We're talking about having something substantive available all the time for adults to choose what they need.

We sometimes think that people who are poor don't have good judgement. Well, that's rubbish. People who are poor have just as many ideas and feelings and attitudes as any of us, and they don't need anyone to make their decisions for them. We don't realize they have opinions because we don't ask for them. If you don't get the families who traditionally stay away from schools then you are pretty well insuring inter-generational illiteracy. The family is the change agent in breaking the vicious cycle of illiteracy. Children's attitudes towards reading are formed long before they ever cross our doorstep.

We deserve a universal system where every child is entitled to the best that we've got and that's got to include parents. If we don't give parents the chance, if they have to live their

lives with diminished dignity, we will get diminished contributions. We have the ability to do this in the school system by getting the family literacy movement in partnership with the school system.

Schools need more money; they can't do everything on what they've got. They need human resources and financial resources. As a country, we have got to give more of our resources to our youngest children and our families. If we want sustained, long-term potential building for our children, we have to reassign how we invest our money. We don't need more research; we've got the research. We need more informed people. We need more passion. We need kick-ass behavior here. It's too late to be polite. Practitioners must inform the policy makers. Policy makers need stories. Research is grand but stories are transformational.

It is cost effective to build social compassion by creating policies that give kids what they need. It is cost effective to enshrine the right of every Canadian child to a happy, productive life.

Emotional support for children and their families

What we have missed in providing learning experiences, and what the parent can provide, is the context of the child's life. There is no day in a child's life that is unimportant, not one single day. The moment to moment living is what counts; it's all one to the child. To think we are orchestrating learning to happen between 9:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m. is ridiculous. Sure we can orchestrate wonderful learning in school but what happens to that child on the way to school is equally important. If that child's spirit is broken by bullying on the way to school, that child is in pain. Anything you try to teach won't be learnt unless you recognize and deal with the emotional tone of that child when he/she arrives.

The literacy of feelings is the first literacy; it is the literacy of intimacy. It determines and predicts our success in everything we do. If you can't get along with the person sitting next to you, then you can forget about learning. We've got to learn to be with ourselves and to be with one another before we learn "stuff".

All any child needs in life is one person to be crazy about them, one person. Sometimes teachers play that role for a child. One of the things we can do is support the roots of literacy and those roots are in the home. We have to make partnerships with our families. If we really want to entrench change, we have to find a way of respectfully inviting and supporting the involvement of families.

Some young children don't know how to hold up a book because no one has ever held up a book for them. When you're a child advocate, the tendency may be to criticize the parent. Rather than blame the family, ask yourself how you can help this family.

We need to be advocates for families and we need to help families advocate for themselves. We have the strength and communication processes but do we have the will?

It means more work, more meetings, more convincing of more bureaucrats, and the loosening of more pocketbooks.

Educators are listened to and we have an identified problem. Literacy rates are soaring, not plummeting, and this is very much related to fragmented families. It's not that our teaching is worse, the problem is at the base. If we don't build a strong foundation to start with, it's very difficult for children to progress through the school system. When basic concepts are not learned, reading becomes very difficult. Mathematical thinking becomes very difficult. These concepts can be learned through discussion and play at home, combined with love. That makes the learning process even more powerful. Parents show that love through their words, their touch, their smiles, and their hugs. The language of love is universal. Sometimes it comes in the form of this 'little piggy went to market'; sometimes it comes in the form of a wink or a good night kiss. There are key people in children's lives who tell them it's enough to wake up and smile. They are fearless learners, and there's nothing in this world they can't do because someone believes in them. Nobody does that like the home, so why would we not support the home to do that?

Conclusion

We have an incredible synergy of information, passion, research, and people. Nothing changes without people. It is people who make all the difference in the world.

We have the opportunity to shine a light on children's futures. The fact that we're here is about literacy, but we're really here about life. Literacy is the currency of success in our system. We have an opportunity to change the order of the day. It's not only an opportunity, it's a privilege to work with children who are our future. In Newfoundland you do a better job than many parts of Canada in bringing arts and recreation to children and this feeds the spirit of the child as much as our instruction feeds their intellectual development. We want children to contribute and feel and live and love. Learning is a heart/hand/mind experience, and true learning encompasses all three.

We talk a lot about individual learning style and multiple intelligences but what about life? What about the little person's life, where they came from this morning and how they left the home. Who helped them and what are they going home to? We have to consider those things too.

There is a movement afoot to entitle every child to a full life. Literacy is the gateway. If we can launch fearless learners in literacy, we are launching so many other things. We have the skill and the family has the love to make every child a masterpiece.

Keynote Address: Elizabeth Hanson

The Basic Skills Agency

Bio: Elizabeth Hanson is Assistant Director at the Basic Skills Agency, which is the national development agency for literacy and numeracy in England and Wales. Liz has been at the agency for four years, and heads up a regional development unit for the north of England that monitors and develops programs in family literacy and numeracy. She is working to develop programs suitable for 14 to 16 year olds and programs suitable for boys. She is also collaborating with specialist schools – those which have specialties like technology, sports, languages and so on – to determine how these schools can be used to attract adults into basic skills programs.

The Basic Skills Agency is an independent registered charity that is supported by a government grant and acts as a development agency. The Agency has existed for 25 years, working solely with adults for the first 20 years, and expanding to work with families and children since then.

The Agency's mission is to help raise standards of basic skills in England and Wales. They define basic skills narrowly, as those required to participate as a citizen: the ability to read, write and speak in English, and to use mathematics at a level necessary to function and progress at work and in society in general.

The aims of the Agency are to advocate, innovate and develop. Funding of programs is done through a separate organization called the Further Education Funding Council. The Agency is a source of national expertise in the issue of basic skills education and strives to keep the issue on the national agenda, while supporting innovation and testing of new approaches.

The Agency works by invitation from bodies that have an interest in developing basic skills programs, including schools, colleges, training providers, local and regional government bodies, and community health and housing organizations. At the same time, though the Agency works with and is funded by government, its independence and authority as a source of expertise allows them to critique and advocate improvement to government policy and programs.

The Agency's work has been underpinned by research and studies which have allowed them to convince government toward action as well as demonstrate which policies are appropriate.

A recent survey determined that about 22% of the population of the UK have below functional levels of literacy and numeracy. About 13% have skills just below the threshold which would require some home-study or a little instruction to correct. Another 4.5% have some skills and would need temporary support to bring them up to

the threshold. The rest have serious skills shortages that would need intensive support for a longer period of time.

Since 1958, there has been a National Child Development Study in the UK which has tracked individuals in 7 year intervals and determined the negative impacts of poor basic skills on life chances. This has demonstrated a causal correlation between poor basic skills and disadvantage.

Given this research, the current government realized the seriousness of the problem. They understood this not only in terms of economic loss, but also of the loss to the society and polity of the nation when so many individuals do not have the basic skills needed to participate and contribute. Consequently, national strategies for literacy and numeracy were implemented in primary and secondary schools, and a new national strategy for adult basic skills is being launched. For the first time, basic skills are high on everyone's agenda, and there is significant government funding, an additional 150 million pounds over three years.

Especially given this funding, there has been a rush of interest in providing basic skills programs. The Agency's work includes ensuring that there is rigour and quality in the programs being delivered and that they successfully help individuals improve their skills. That there is a national strategy and that programs are delivered in the schools is resulting in rising levels of literacy and numeracy. We also need to deliver programs to adults who have left the school system without having achieved basic skills, and ensure the programs are appropriate to their needs and allow them to develop their skills and move on.

The Education Minister, at the Agency's suggestion, initiated a national discussion of interested parties, resulting in the recent report called A Fresh Start which calls for radical new measures to raise standards of literacy and numeracy. Drawing on the success of family literacy and numeracy programs developed by the Agency, one of the very clear messages from the report was the importance of raising basic skills within families. The report advocates for a family literacy or family numeracy program in every disadvantaged area.

In the UK, there is data that helps identify areas where literacy levels are low; family literacy courses are targeted to these areas. Family Literacy programs have only three aims: to improve the literacy of parents, to improve parents' ability to help their children and to improve children's acquisition of reading and writing skills.

The program was developed from a pilot program started in 1992 with four experienced adult skills deliverers. The courses last between 72 and 96 hours over ten to twelve weeks. They involve ten to twelve parents, identified as having few or no qualifications, with their children aged from three to six years old.

The emphasis is on developing literacy, and parenting is supported as a context for the literacy learning. Childcare is provided. There are separate sessions for the parents to work on their skills with an adult tutor, as well as sessions for the children to work with

an early years teacher. Then there are joint sessions where parents have the opportunity to support their children. This process is guided by the early years teachers and the adult tutors.

In the UK there is an adult accreditation called Word Power that certifies competence in literacy skills. The parents work toward gaining this certificate. The parent sessions include information about how they can work with and support their children, and provide the opportunity to plan for the joint sessions.

In the joint sessions, the teachers model good practice. Many parents who have not had good parenting don't know how to play with and support their children. Tutors notice the transformation that takes place during a family literacy course where parents also learn how to relate to their children.

In order to prove the program was working effectively, the National Foundation for Education Research was asked to evaluate and research the program in depth.It was determined that the courses were successful in attracting parents who had difficulties with literacy, mainly women, most in their twenties and early thirties. Since the program is open to anyone who is the primary caregiver of the child, there were a few grandmothers participating as well.

The average retention rates on adult basic skills courses is usually 55 – 60%. With the family literacy course, 91% of parents complete the course with demonstrable improvements in both their reading and their writing skills. Participants were assessed at the beginning and end of the program, and then twelve weeks later. Not only did they make progress between the beginning and end of the course, but that progress was sustained.

For the children, as well, the benefits achieved during the period of the family literacy course were sustained after they left the course. In fact, follow up research with the course participants demonstrated that the progress had been sustained over 32 months. Family literacy not only works, family literacy lasts as well.

So family literacy was absolutely embraced by the government. They could see the difference it was making to people's lives. Family literacy and numeracy are seen as absolutely crucial in preventing early failure and as successful in breaking the intergenerational effect of poor basic skills. Given their demonstrated success, family literacy and numeracy programs are now supported in all local education authorities in the UK.

Last year, the Basic Skills Agency received the UNESCO Award for Literacy for the family literacy program. It was awarded this prize because it had a sound basis in research, there was thorough planning and development, and the impact of the program was clearly demonstrated by independent research.

Roots of Empathy

Speaker: Mary Gordon

Bio: Mary Gordon has been developing school-based Family Literacy and parenting programs since the early 1980s, and currently administrates Parenting and Family Literacy Programs with the Toronto District School Board. Her classroom-based parenting course, Roots of Empathy, is used throughout the country, and her models and programs have received international recognition.

Mary Gordon's passion is helping children learn and succeed in life and one of the ways she does that is through a program she designed called Roots of Empathy. It is a classroom based parenting course – for children. The Roots of Empathy program started with a small donation from a private foundation and has grown into fifty-four classrooms. It is now in three provinces and has invitations to Japan, Australia, South Africa, and England. The main goal of the program is to develop empathy in children. The philosophy that guides the program is that, with empathy for themselves and others, children will be more able to develop to their full potential as complete human beings, and less likely to be cruel.

Building Relationships with Parents

It is fundamental to develop positive relationships with parents even before children enter the school system. The experiences and exposure from 0-3 years have a greater influence on our development than anything else that happens to us. If we are subjected to a lot of stress we become "hard wired" which means we are extremely alert to stresses in our environment. These are the children who lash out at the world. When a child witnesses a fight between parents, that child is in emotional pain. We know sick children don't learn, but neither do children who are in emotional pain. Until somebody addresses that child's reality, as far as teaching is concerned, the rest of the day is wasted.

Children are exposed to stress outside the home too. In larger urban centres, children may grow up without a community and not feel a belonging to something bigger than themselves. The levels of volunteerism are shrinking globally and people are becoming individualists rather than caring community members. This is not good for our children who are 100% of the future. The landscape of childhood has changed and teachers often see a "sea of suffering" before them. Roots of Empathy provides a non-threatening outreach to these vulnerable populations.

Parents are the child's first teachers. The program approaches parents without judging them. Rather than evaluate a parent as lazy or uncaring, they consider the parents' first three years of life and what their starting points must have been. This is an approach of kindness and compassion and, of course, empathy. Empathy is the ability to identify with another's feelings. Roots of Empathy supports parenting capacity. Part of supporting that parenting capacity is to teach parents the things they need to know so they can maximize their children's opportunities to reach optimal development with literacy and

life. Rather than approaching parents with a prepared agenda, you respond to their learning needs.

The Program -- Content

The parent-child relationship is key and Roots of Empathy teaches that relationship to children too. By learning how to be parents children learn empathy, first for babies then for themselves and then for others. Children in Kindergarten up to Grade 8 have an opportunity to look at the miracle of the relationship between a parent and a child. Pre and post evaluations of children who've been through the program show that empathy is absolutely measurable and increases dramatically. This is about emotional literacy which is required for life and affects every other kind of literacy. It determines our quality of life and filters through everything else in our lives.

The focus is on babies, not children. Nobody feels that here's another shrinky-dink program to try to find out what's wrong with me. It doesn't target a particular group; it is universal. It is not an intervention program; it is a prevention program. It is not about fixing something that's broken; it's about helping something to not get broken.

When children are asked why babies cry, they give physical reasons -- they're wet or hungry or tired. After the program, they give psycho-social reasons -- they're lonely or sad. For as many depressed mothers there is a comparable number of depressed babies. This new awareness is then applied to their friends and classmates. Sensitivity is increased and immediately the tone of the classroom changes.

The students get a real sense of what is involved in being a parent. It's about being up all night worrying about a sick child, not being able to hang with your friends, not being able to use the phone, not spending money on cigarettes and movies but on diapers and formula. It's about parenting too soon and having challenges in life beyond your ability to cope.

It's also about learning that babies need nurturance and stimulation to thrive.
In that sensory learning stage where everything goes into the mouth and everything has to be touched -- that's the child scientist at work. The child who's at everything is the child who's driven to learn. The child who has a million questions is the absolute Einstein. Our attitude, very often in society, is that when you can read and process things quietly at your desk, that's what learning looks like. In reality, learning looks different for every person.

The best learning that lasts for life is early learning. In terms of literacy it means that you hold that young child, show them a book and read them the words. Your multisensing pathway is your touch when you hold them, and they hear you and sense your temperature and smell while they are looking at the pictures in the book. Most of us remember at some point being held and read to and we associated learning with that safe place. That is a powerful learning experience.

Children can feel enormously useless. They want to feel useful and helpful to the family because it holds the most significance to them. They are very family focused and this is powerful information because it helps us understand how to respect children and help them be full people.

Cooperation versus competition

A mother's parenting is judged on the report card of her children. The ratings are not on the good little people they are, or their joy of life, or their ability to be somebody's friend, or be creative and contribute to the world, but on how they produce on a mathematics test. And it doesn't matter the number, it's the relative number. So it doesn't matter how good you are, if there's someone who's better, it's not good enough.

All the research tells us that competition is not good in the early years. In fact, the more trust and faith you put into a child's ability to figure things out and problem solve, the more you enable that child to become a fearless learner. The more you do that, the more you are building the capacity of that child to be brilliant.

Leadership is built in this way too. The child who never speaks up is the child who is asked to help with an infant, and then that child is asked to comment on the experience. There is no risk in commenting. They are never going to look stupid. The instructors are taught never to say "good answer". They do not evaluate any child's answer. They "thank-you". The message is "I don't care whether your answer is good, I care that you have an opinion and you had the courage to share it. If you take the risk to speak out in this class what you have to say will be heard by everybody and will be honoured".

The number one reason for sadness in childhood is exclusion. When anyone feels like this you have an unjust society, and the classroom is a microcosm of this broader society. We weren't designed to be alone and if we can teach a four year old that it's not a just society if somebody feels excluded and alone, than we have real hope for a future where we care how other people feel. In Roots of Empathy, every child's work is read aloud so they see themselves as authors and illustrators. Their work is honoured as well as their feelings. It's liberating to hear how your classmates feel.

So we have, in classrooms, the unique opportunity to make the world right for children, five hours a day for five days a week. That's a bigger chance than anyone else gets. Psycho-therapy doesn't happen like that and we mightn't need psycho-therapy if there were compassionate classrooms where children learned ways of being respectful and caring of one another, where it wasn't an embarrassment to admit that you had a feeling, and where you felt comfortable challenging cruelty. A good society builds the ways and means to solidarity and empathy. We don't have a good society unless we have solidarity and empathy and you can do that classroom by classroom.

The very last session of the program is for good-byes and good wishes. The children evaluate the program and are asked at every level "What would you wish for the baby,

when the baby is your age?" In this way we find out what kind of world we are going to inhabit, because what these children say is the kind of world we will live in.

The Program -- Process

There are 27 sessions. The families who come in are normal, everyday parents. In Toronto this is a wonderful opportunity to walk the talk about inclusion, tolerance and diversity.

There is a four day training component, a three day session, and then a follow up day at mid-term or when needed. There's a toll-free line, an e-mail address, and a newsletter coming as support during program delivery.

In the first year of a program, there isn't a local mentor (meaning someone who can come into your classroom or with whom you can meet). In the second year there is a mentor selected from those who received training in the previous year.

The cost is about $19,000. This trains ten instructors, provides them with curriculum materials, training guides, the warm line and e-mail support. The training is provided on site with the additional cost of flying in Ms. Gordon.

The program deliverers go out of their way to outreach to families who have babies with some sort of physical or developmental challenge. Local children's hospitals like to be involved with the program, especially for infants with problems.

A school board typically requests a Roots of Empathy Program. The staff assigned for training are often the public health nurses, early childhood educators, guidance counselors, or people without a classroom assignment. People should be selected who either have experience with little babies or families or experience in the classroom. The training manual has information on school children and teaching strategies, as well as information on infants, and ideas on how to work supportively with a family.
There is a developmental focus, outlining the age stage development of babies, but the emphasis is on individual development and individual time tables. Although the training runs for only four days, there are over three hundred pages of curriculum. Every lesson has activities that are developed from the goals of the program, so everything is done for a reason. People running the program find this very helpful.

Conclusion

The program encourages social compassion, and teachers notice the tone of their classroom changing as children become more sensitive to one another. The program promotes tolerance and inclusion rather than competition. Nobody is ashamed to name their feelings because they have developed a literacy for feelings.

There is a strong link between empathy and aggression. If you can feel for your victim, you're less likely to victimize the person. If you can't feel for your victim, there's nothing

constraining you. We know that children who have high levels of empathy care about others. How likely are you to hurt someone if you care and can identify with how they are feeling?

Empathy is inversely related to aggression and violence. As levels of empathy go up, we have a safer, calmer, more secure, trusting society. That impacts on our health, our criminal justice system, and every budget in our government. So anything we can do in the universal delivery system of a classroom -- where we're not targeting or pointing fingers – but rather propping up the ability of all children and teachers and parents to be more caring and responsive, serves us all well.

www.rootsofempathy.org

Summary of Workshops

A1 — Extending Families

Presenters: **Calvin Butt**, Founder, Nourishing Foundations for Literacy Development; **Francis Ennis**, Program Consultant, Population and Public Health Branch, Health Canada, Atlantic Region; **Bill Fagan**, Literacy Advocate, MacMorran Community Centre, St. John's; **Paula Power**, Advisory Committee Member for Books for Babies/Extending Families Project, Corner Brook; **Mary Hynes**, Grandparents as Teaching Partners; **Lori Fritz**, NF Parent-Child Mother Goose Program.

This session provided a look at the project Expanding Literacy by Extending Families, which adapted and delivered existing family literacy initiatives to non-traditional audiences in non-traditional settings. Representatives from each of the five participating programs gave presentations.

The **"Books for Babies"** program, designed in 1994, is all about reading from birth. Volunteers distribute kits containing literacy "tools" (books, book bag, tips) to parents and guardians at the hospital maternity ward. The program was adapted to target "mature family members" in seniors' groups and residential complexes to promote the idea of reading from birth and to encourage their involvement. A workshop on tips for language development and for reading to young children was developed and delivered to the program participants.

PRINTS (Parents' Roles Interacting with Teacher Support) is a family literacy program designed for parents of preschoolers and kindergarten children. It is structured around five steps to literacy and five roles that parents can play. The five steps of the program are: 1) talk/oral language; 2) play; 3) environment print; 4) books and book sharing; and 5) scribbling, drawing, and writing. The five roles for parents are: 1) Providing opportunities for children; 2) Recognizing their involvement; 3) Interacting with the child; 4) Modeling literacy activities; and 5) Setting guidelines with the children. The new target groups for this program were babysitters, daycare workers, seniors and members of the Association for New Canadians.

Mother Goose is a national program that has been running in the province since 1998. It was developed by a social worker to help children's language skills, oral language development and oral language activities through prevention and early intervention, parent-child conversation, and access to various resources and materials. For the Expanding Literacy by Extending Families project the Mother Goose training workshop was adapted for adolescents who care for children.

The **Grandparents as Teaching Partners** program adapted from the program Parents as Teaching Partners which engaged parents in identifying literacy concerns and assisting directly with resource people to address these. Grandparents as Teaching Partners offered workshops to encourage seniors to get involved in developing children's literacy skills.

The program also provided grandparents with the opportunity to interact with children in school activities in the classroom and on field trips.

Nourishing Foundations for Literacy Development helps make parents of young children (2-5 years) aware of their role in their children's future educational experiences. The program helps train parents on how best to carry out this role through caring, playing, oral language and print activities. This motivates young children towards literacy, develops healthy personalities, sound bodies, sound minds, positive self-concept and positive social relationships. New target participants included elders, babysitters, family learning centre workers and daycare workers.

During discussion it was noted that these programs are geared towards adults who can read. What about adults who can't? The Mother Goose Program, for example, provides information in both print and tape format. It was reiterated that parents who can't read can still interact with their children in language development. Program facilitators can assist the parent/caregiver to effectively interact with the child. To encourage the participation of adults with low literacy skills the programs need to be fun, informal and not structured like in a school setting.

A2 — Supporting Family Literacy Through Community-Based Programs

Presenters: **Hope Colbourne**, Program Coordinator, Northern Peninsula/Labrador Straits Family Resource Centre Inc.; **Deborah Capps**, Program Coordinator, Brighter Futures Coalition, St. John's; **Lois Roberts**, Program Director, Aboriginal Family Centre, Aboriginal HeadStart Initiative, Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

The presenters began by outlining some of the programs their centres have been involved in. The following programs are community-based programs or provide support and resources to community-based literacy programs:

Book of the Month – provides access to good books
Books for Babies
Computer literacy projects – develop and extend computer skills
Early Learning Canada- three foci: 1) Parents are primary caregivers and teachers, 2) Learning is a natural process, 3) Parents who know how their children learn will be best equipped to help their children learn.
Healthy Baby Program- health support during pregnancy
Home Play Program
Literacy and Parent support – meets the needs of people who wish to improve their literacy skills
Mother Goose
Nobody's Perfect-- For 0 – 5 years, 6 – 8 week sessions
Nutrition workshops – informal group sessions, assisted by a nutritionist
Parents as Teaching Partners

Programs for effective parent support – support groups led by trained parents, based on parents being supported in their roles as parents
Paired Reading -- Positive Reading Practice

PRINTS
Read to Succeed
School Readiness Program
Toy and book lending

How the three program centres work with families:

Engage parents through volunteering
Parenting workshops
Give ownership to communities by having community representatives on advisory councils; programs designed to meet the needs of the individual community; programs at a community centre, a school, church, etc.
Modeling- for parents, children, staff
Prevention and promotion for well being: focus on strengths; provide support/training; crisis counseling; referrals
Eliminate barriers to participation: provide transportation, childcare, food/snacks
Celebrate small victories: attendance awards; reading awards; personal triumphs, stories/photographs
Parent/child programs are most effective
Encourage networking between parent and families: social nights; parent/staff potlucks; childcare co-ops
Promote programs in community gathering places
Use food related events such as BBQ's
Keep the culture: read and speak in the Mother Tongue and use cultural advisor/elder visits to pass on culture
Include parental involvement in conferences and eliminate barriers such as cost

Literacy Promotion Activities:

Promote learning through play: tent in back yard; dancing; music
Informal group sessions: elders singing
Language and literacy activities: games such as matching Dalmations
Visual displays, displays of children's work
Newsletter: births/deaths, community events.
Monthly calendar: written and illustrated events
Drawing and writing: access to materials, crayons/markers/paints
Home visits: recruit new families; reconnect with families; develop relationships
Family resource kit, welcome kit
Books: public library; special picture books such as on toilet training

A3 — Words to Live By: The Strategic Literacy Plan

(Copies of the plan are available on line at www.gov.nf.ca or through the Strategic Literacy Planning Unit, Dept. of Education)

Presenter: **Cindy Christopher**, Director of Policy and Planning - Literacy, Department of Education.

Cindy Christopher gave an overview of the Strategic Literacy Plan with a special focus on early literacy initiatives currently under development. Under the Plan, literacy is defined as the ability to understand and use the printed word in daily activities at home, at work and in the community. A person becomes literate by going beyond knowing how to read and write to using this knowledge for personal, social, economic, or other purposes. The Plan addresses literacy for all ages, both within and outside the formal education system.

The indicators profile a province where education levels are improving but remain below Canadian levels. The problem of low literacy is most acute among our older population and in rural areas of the province. Achievement of K – 12 students in reading, vocabulary and writing has improved but is still below desirable levels.

In January, 1998, Government announced its intention to develop a Strategic Literacy Plan. A Literacy Strategic Planning Unit was created and a broad based Steering Committee was appointed. A province-wide public consultation provided feedback from stakeholders on what was needed.

Cindy outlined Objectives of the Plan that directly relate to early literacy development and some of the actions the Strategic Literacy Planning Unit are employing to meet these objectives. Actions include: Working in collaboration with partners, to distribute existing or develop new information about appropriate activities to foster literacy development; Working with partners to implement strategies for early identification of, and appropriate interventions for, children at risk of low literacy; Providing support for professional development activities in areas of literacy knowledge; Increasing public awareness of the importance of literacy.

There was a discussion on how community and government can partner to further the objectives outlined in the plan. Questions revolved around the resources available how best to utilize them. Some participants suggested we should be including Newfoundland and Labrador writers as well as oral histories in the school curriculum. Participants noted gaps in funding for particular groups, such as Level 1 Adult Basic Education and Basic Literacy. Some wondered whether the definition of literacy should be limited to reading and writing; what about emotional literacy which includes eye contact and touching? Should computer literacy be included in the SLP? They noted that there is a need for collaboration between Health and Education, and Family Resource Centres are a valuable tool for this collaboration, especially for addressing the needs of the most at risk.

A4 — Early Brain Development and Literacy

Darlene Halleran, Early Childhood Education Instructor, Lawrence College and Memorial University; **Lynn Smyth**, CUPW Family Resource Centre and Chair of Early Childhood Educators of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The brain needs stimulation to develop. The most important part of neurological development is in the first five years of life and ninety percent of this work is done in the first two years. A window of opportunity exists up to 15 months, where the brain shows heigthened sensitivity to stimulation. After that point learning becomes more difficult.

There are two principles of brain development: 1) the outside world accessed by our five senses and 2) our relationships with people early in life. Parents and family play an important role as teachers. They need to be emotionally and cognitively involved, being there for the child and listening and talking about their learning. Attachment is very important, along with providing a loving, stable, secure environment.

Other influences on learning in the early years come from the community, preschool, schools and the health system. There has been some discussion of bringing schools and preschools together but no conclusions have been reached about how to do this. Schools differ in the materials available and the services offered for children. The curriculum is intensifying and children present with more issues. For workers pay differences between teachers and Early Childhood Educators are an issue in working together.

Play is a very important tool in child development. Children can explore and imagine through play, which enhances creativity and imagination. Children are learning as they play. For example, in block play, they learn geometry and math skills, shapes and names of shapes, math, unit blocks, fractions and even physics- through building towers. Parents often lose their sense of fun and play so it's hard for them to play with their children, to know the joy and fun that children get out of this. Sometimes parents push children too hard when they need to let them flow and play, to use the knowledge they have and allow time for new information to sink in.

Resources:
Early Learning Canada – a program for parents
Canadian Childcare Federation – for information and new research "You bet I can"

B1 — Early Intervention and the Role of the Reading Specialist

Presenters: **Margaret Ryall**, Program Specialist for Literacy, Avalon East School; **Mary O'Gorman**, Reading Specialist, Cormack Trail School Board.

In 1996 a report called "Special Matters" by Patricia Canning had the first reference to Reading Specialists.The author, at that time, recommended the Department of Education hire one reading specialist; each regional School Board now has one. The role of the

Reading Specialist varies from one Board to the next depending on the needs of the region as determined by their School Board.

Mary reiterated that parents continue to be the major literacy influence in a child's life. She named some programs that support families' involvement in a child's reading: Accelerated Reading Program, Grandparents for Reading, book clubs that provide families with regular access to books, the Take Home Reading Program (books in a bag, reading logs, etc.), and parent/family volunteers in classrooms. In her region she has a public meeting with parents to talk about different ways to encourage and promote literacy/reading and how parents can use these. There was general consensus that some work needs to be done on the relationship between home and school.

Reading specialists provide ongoing professional development for teachers, assist teachers with ongoing tracking and documentation of a child's literacy development, and suggest strategies and resources for teachers to use. Discussion ensued about whether reading specialists should be program focused or individual focused.

Margaret sees her role as a team leader in developing a plan around literacy development for her district. She says that each district needs to assess the current situation and determine where they need to go.

There was some discussion on what the universities are offering teachers for professional development in this area. A spirited discussion arose over problems and responsibilities in the area of literacy development and also over who is responsible for which problems. It was agreed that good relationships and general cooperation, as well as more reading specialists and program development, are needed to achieve a well rounded literacy program.

B2 — Overcoming Barriers through Innovative Literacy Practices

Presenters: **Barbara Marshall**, Partners in Learning, Labrador Straits; **Ed Wade**, Educational Consultant/Literacy Coordinator, Froude Avenue Community Centre, St. John's; **Gwen MaGuire**, St. Theresa's School, St. John's.

Barbara Marshall spoke about some of the barriers people faced by being forced into ABE (Adult Basic Education) programs after the cod moratorium was announced: child care issues; older person homecare responsibilities; and bad experiences with former schooling. One of the students, Agnes Pike, realized that the teaching process being used was not for her and many others were like her. They discovered that even the use of the term "literacy" was a barrier, whereas if they asked people if they wanted to improve their reading and writing skills people were more open to it.

They opened a learning centre that was not just for people who had literacy issues but open to all of the community. They went into people's homes to talk about where they've come from, what their life experiences are and what they wanted from life.

They encountered other barriers including people not valuing their traditional/non-book knowledge as a form of education and as valuable knowledge. They devalued their experience "I'm only working in the fish plant". It was important to realize the many different aspects of people's lives and build relationships with them. Also important was to avoid the deficit model of development: telling people they have something wrong with them and I'm going to fix you.

Two oral histories were created to acknowledge the important experiences of seniors. These also provided local material for intergenerational interaction, leading to some children's interest and research in the area's history. Subsequently, the material was used as the basis for a play.

Gwen MaGuire spoke about the importance in getting support and interest from a number of different sources to help solve a problem with reading skills in the student population in her school. Her experience started with a letter to the business community to get funding for books, and included a principal who had vision, a committee of teachers frustrated with the problem and outside resources from the University who were invited in to discuss the problem.

The resulting program was based on a "Success for All" program. The program involved grades 1, 2 and 3 students who hadn't learned to read by the end of grade 1. They tested and screened for language and literacy skills, developing a literacy profile of strengths and needs. Children were regrouped according to ability, the grouping only in place for instruction in language arts.

The program involved six teachers in grades 1, 2, and 3. Julie Sullivan helped develop an eclectic approach, using different approaches to best suit each individual child. Test results in two years moved from far below to on par with national standards.

Ed Wade presented on the faces of literacy and the importance of having a presence in children's lives. Allow them to get to know you and you can build a relationship. The Froude Avenue Community Centre opens at 7:30 am for breakfast, for nutrition and to nurture the relationship. In the school they now open the gym and computer labs during lunch, without encountering any discipline problems since offering this service in Feb 2000.

He shared some stories of successes with students. He pointed out that it's important to remember that when the children don't do well in school the parents feel that they're failing as well. Building literacy skills helps build family relationships.

What does he do? He is one of the faces of literacy, there when they come for breakfast, there at the gym during lunch, there to help them after school, and there if they need any help after supper.

B3 — Reading – A Family Affair

Presenter: **Helen Sinclair**, Program Consultant (Child Care Services), Child, Youth and Family Programs, Department of Health and Community Services, St. John's.

Parents want their children to be good readers and writers and to be successful in school. Children who can't read tend to fall behind and/or are much slower in learning and outlined ways they can foster their child's emerging literacy.

Reading is getting meaning from print. A child who can say words doesn't necessarily know how to read. To be able to read a child needs to know how language works, how books work, to develop a sense of story and to enjoy reading. Children need to know you read from top to bottom, front to back. They need to understand the actual meaning of the words in books and they need to see the rhythm of stories by being involved in the process from beginning to middle to end.

Reading pictures is a strategy children use before learning to read. Parents can help by listening and talking with children, by using repetition, by drawing their attention to words in their environment, and by providing them with stories and books.

Advice on books to buy for children:

- Choose books that are attractive to children
- Choose books that reflect the child's experiences
- Choose books that reflect the child's interests
- Choose books that are age appropriate

Choose books that promote the concepts they need to begin to read for themselves
Choose repetitive books; fairy tales; ABC books; poetry/nursery rhymes; wordless books; counting books; cumulative books; factual books; story books

Advice on ways to support parents:

- Book lending programs
- Modelling reading/story telling and other literacy related activities
- Lending or copying parent resource materials
- Providing written copies of songs and rhymes

Setting up book clubs

- Inventing word games
- Providing resource sheets of rhymes
- Used book sales
- Well advertised times and dates of library/community activities

B4 — Strategic Literacy Funding

Presenters: **Cindy Christopher**, Executive Secretary, Literacy Funding Committee, Literacy Unit, Department of Education; **Carrie Hammond**, Program Officer, National Literacy Secretariat, Ottawa, Canada.

Funding available annually for literacy development programs in Newfoundland and Labrador: (approximate amounts that may change from time to time due to special circumstances)
National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) $700,000.
Literacy Development Council- NF & Lab (LDC-NL) $300,000.
Literacy Endowment Fund Interest(comes on stream in 2001) $150,000.

Prior to the establishment of the new Strategic Literacy Funding Committee separate applications for funding were made to the National Literacy Secretariat and the Literacy Development Council. These programs had separate review committees and separate sets of deadlines. Sometimes funding from one committee was contingent on the other supporting it, so decisions might have to wait through two committee's reviews. The Strategic Literacy Funding Committee was established in 2000 to find a better way to coordinate federal and provincial literacy funding, consistent with the Strategic Literacy Plan. One committee replaced the former separate review committees of the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) and the Literacy Development Council of Newfoundland and Labrador (LDC-NL).

The new committee is chaired by the Department of Education and includes representatives from each funding organization (NLS and LDC), and the Public Information and Library Resources Board, College of the North Atlantic, School Districts, and a member at large (generally a community representative). The Executive Secretary for the committee is also a member of the Department of Education.

While the application process has changed the criteria has not. Program delivery is only eligible under the provincial portion of funding. Applications are now made to the Strategic Literacy Funding Committee, (c/o the Literacy Unit at the Department of Education) which makes recommendations to the two funding agencies. There are two annual deadlines for proposals. These are reviewed about 4 weeks after deadline. If the committee does not make a recommendation to a funding agency, applicants are notified by the Literacy Unit. If the Committee does make a recommendation to a funding agency, it determines the most appropriate agency or sometimes a combination of both. Each funding agency then follows its own review/approval process and notifies the applicant if successful.

The mandate of the LDC includes assessing and responding to the literacy needs of the province and coordinating literacy programs and services through fostering cooperation among literacy development agencies. One way the Council does this is through its grants program.

The mandate of the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS), Department of Human Resources Development Canada, is to facilitate the involvement of all sectors of society in creating a more literate Canada. One of the ways that the NLS does this is by providing financial assistance for literacy projects. The NLS, in partnership with the province's Department of Education, provides federal support for adult literacy projects, family literacy projects and literacy projects aimed at youth between the ages of 16 and 24 who are out of school.

Funding activities:

1. Increasing public awareness eg posters, forums, speakers, community activities
2. Improving access and outreach – studying barriers and how to reduce barriers, consultations re: reducing barriers
3. Improving coordination and information sharing
4. Supporting research initiatives
5. Developing learning materials
6. Program Delivery (Provincial portion only)

NLS does not fund direct, on-going literacy services or annual activities. Neither funding agency supports projects requiring 100% funding or capital costs.

The presenters gave an overview of the funding application and some cautionary notes on completing it: objectives should be clear and few in number; careful budget preparation including information on other funding or in kind contribution. Applicants may contact either the Literacy Unit, Department of Education or the National Literacy Secretariat for assistance when preparing proposals.

A question and answer period ensued that described the problems the community is having with the new application process, funding restrictions and lack of adequate funding.

Participants questioned whether the new process has slowed down the application process. Federal proposals do not seem to be getting processed as quickly. The presenters responded that they see the new process as positive and not contributing to a slowdown, however, other temporary extenuating factors such as the recent audit of the Department of Human Resources Development Canada, new forms and the fall Federal Election may have contributed.

Participants also identified the need for long-term funding and core funding for literacy organizations. They felt this needs to be addressed realistically and with the community. They indicated that NLS is not funding delivery of services and this is problematic. They felt that funding available from the Literacy Development Council of Newfoundland and Labrador is not adequate to cover this. Presenters advised participants that there is an evaluation presently underway to determine the best model for delivery of Basic Literacy/ABE Level I programs for this province and how these should be funded would be a consideration.

The funding agencies were asked to consider:

1. Long term funding and core funding for organizations.
2. Emotional literacy – investing in those who are investing in children.
3. There are no programs "in greatest need"; every program is turning away people on a continuous basis.
4. There's been enough money spent on research and needs assessment.
5. Money is needed for implementation.

C1 — National Adult Literacy Database

Presenter: **Lorette Chiasson**, Project Officer, National Adult Literacy Database Inc. (NALD).

The National Adult Literacy Database Inc. (NALD) is a federally incorporated non-profit service organization linked to international literacy agencies. Lorette provided an overview of services that NALD provides to family literacy stakeholders and a demonstration on using the Web Guide.

A website that makes provincial resources available to people across the country.
Free networks to people across Canada.
A discussion group on the Net for people who wish to get information or discuss literacy issues.
An extra email account so people can have privacy of their own account.
Internet training.
Access to the Canadian Library Association and papers on the importance of family literacy.
Consultation and referral.

As of September 2000 the NALD had 77,587 users on their site who viewed 531,369 pages of information.

Website address: www.nald.ca

C2 — Building Community Capacity through Intergenerational Learning

Presenters: **Bev Kirby**, Community Education Network of Southwestern Newfoundland; **Agnes Pike**, Partners in Learning Literacy Centre, West St. Modeste, Labrador.

The presenters identified the main factors needed for human resource development and community capacity building:

Working in partnership
Looking at the community as a whole
Supporting community involvement
Supporting community decision making
Recognizing linkages throughout the community

The presenters defined community capacity building as building skill and knowledge bases, **local** institutions, **local** resources and programs that empower communities.

Agnes Pike gave an overview of the steps she went through to arrive at the founding of "Partners in Learning" beginning with an education in her home that was more relevant than what was offered in school, to the problems under TAGS (The Atlantic Groundfish Strategy) during the Cod Moratorium when displaced fishery workers were forced into the classroom for retraining. She saw that needs were not being met and founded "Partners in Learning," a program designed to help those who fell through the gaps. One of the projects carried out by the Centre was the publication of two oral history books.

Bev Kirby spoke about how her area is focusing on literacy and how the schools are opening up to parents and encouraging their involvement. She gave an overview of the Community Education Network. The Network has six strategic directions:

Prevention and early intervention
Community in schools
Career education and education Strategies
Community literacy
Community leadership
Participatory communication

She described a variety of programs they are offering such as the preschool and family resource centre, and a very successful prenatal nutrition program.

There was a general discussion about the kind of literacy we wanted. Participants expressed concern about losing community schools, about the value of children, about the provincial government taking responsibility for children under five years of age, about what difference the Strategic Literacy Plan will make. What are the implications of the changing demographics in our province: an aging population, the urban/rural divide? We have to plan our future in light of these changing demographics and we should work together and stop the competitive nature of some programs that pit schools against each

other. There is a lot of frustration because communities already know what they need; now they need a political commitment for resources to meet those needs.

C3 — Parent Involvement in Life Long Learning

Presenters: **Carol Ann Farrell**, Coordinator of Learn for Tomorrow, Burin Peninsula Laubach Literacy Council and Provincial Representative on the Board of Directors of Laubauch Literacy of Canada; **Rod Jeddore**, St. Anne's School, Conne River.

Carol Ann led a discussion-based workshop on what life long learning is, its needs and its benefits. Life long learning includes formal and informal learning. It's about growing and developing mind, body and spirit. The benefits are both personal and social: self-esteem, fulfillment, fun, practical skills, and friendship.

Participants looked at three kinds of learning:

A. Formal learning -- Basic Literacy, ABE, College courses- career, personal development, and community based learning programs.

B. Informal learning – learning that comes from living, from our relationships, the world around us, our culture, recreation and spiritual life. Some of this learning has been lost or devalued.

C. Passing our learning on and valuing our knowledge. Participants looked at learning their grandparents have that has been lost or devalued. They listed what they would like to learn from them in recreation, culture, community living, spirituality and the world around us.

Rod presented on some practical ways the community can use its citizens. He is now learning his own language, Mi'kmaq, from grandparents, aunts, uncles, and getting them involved. How to get grandparents to classrooms? Invite them to school or even better - go to them as they may not believe they have anything to teach in the school. Encourage them to pass on their life experiences. We learn by modeling and children pick up on all our behaviour.

He talked about a new pilot program: "Adopt an Elder" where a student goes to an elder's home once a week to help them and to learn from them. Getting an elder to be comfortable with you is very important to start the process of learning from them. You need to make a connection with the person. The program helps to get the elders involved; it gives them a vested interest in it.

C4 — Factors Underlying Successful Family Literacy Programs

Presenters: **Bill Fagan**, Memorial University Visiting Professor and Literacy Advocate, MacMorran Community Centre, St. John's; **Una Hynes**, PRINTS Facilitator, St. Joseph's, Salmonier; **Juanita McDonald**, facilitator/parent; **Theresa Butland**, parent, St. Catherine's.

The focus of this workshop was on discussing factors which make a family literacy program successful. The data came from a research study on the PRINTS (Parents' Roles Interacting with Teacher Support) in which all presenters were involved. Bill Fagan, the author of the program and the research study, introduced certain research findings and each of the other participants elaborated on these through experience and example. Information came from observations, and interviews with facilitators, parents, children, and teachers. Following are some of the key factors underlying a successful program including comments from all presenters.

**** Change in Attitude Towards Children's Learning***

Parents began to realize that children are never too young to learn. Some were under the impression that children could not develop any meaningful literacy skills until they were age 5. "Enjoying what they do is an important part of learning". "Learning can happen in a range of places, like the corner of the living room".

**** Faciliation Style, Socialization/Support***

Parents learn best when there is a warm, caring facilitator. Parents must really understand what is expected of them. The PRINTS program involves parents learning through hands-on activities, and parents found this most helpful in getting control of different concepts and tasks. The research showed that learning is indeed social, and this is as important for parents as it is for children. Parents wanted to take time to talk, to share, to have a cup of tea, to be part of a group that had a keen interest in helping their children's literacy development.

**** Understanding Organization/ Structure of PRINTS, Obtaining Useful Knowledge Skills***

PRINTS is based around Steps and Roles. There are five Steps:

1. Books and book sharing: parents always reading to their children, special time to share, talk about your favourite books.
2. Oral language skills: self talk, describing what you are doing, children become aware of language, descriptive words.
3. Play: informal board games, word games, guessing games, etc.
4. Using print in the environment: road signs, signs. Knowing that learning can take place anywhere.
5. Scribbling/writing/drawing: letting children draw freely, learning about forming letters properly.

There are five Roles:

1. Providing opportunity
2. Recognizing children's involvement
3. Interacting with the children
4. Modeling
5. Setting Guidelines

The research showed clearly that facilitators and parents who understood the framework of the program in terms of Steps and Roles, rather than as a number of activities, were more inclined to provide a more productive and enriching experience for their children. Parents with this framework, were more inclined to see and seize many opportunities for promoting literacy development. As one parent said: "I never knew there was a learning field outside my door."

**** Sense of Ownership***

There are different occasions in the PRINTS Program when parents provide input and develop ownership - helping with concept development, sharing literacy stories, and suggesting modifications for various activities. Parents need to feel they have a role in directing their experiences and not just doing what someone else directed.

**** Materials/Resources***

Parents were amazed that so many activities could be made at such a low cost - from magazines, flyers, newspapers, bristol board, glue, etc. They all appreciated the books that were given out at the end of each session for their children. These were important as motivators for both parents and children.

Summary

Four junctures in the learning process of training parents to help their children in their literacy development were identified: from workshop presenter to facilitator; from facilitator to parents, from parents to children; and from children to school tasks. Anywhere along this continuum, effective learning can break down. It is important that each participant provides for most effective learning. This workshop reported some of the factors that would need to be considered for this to happen.

Summary of Final Plenary Session

The final plenary examined the question "How do we further the development of family literacy in the province?" The plenary split into four groups to consider next steps and how to take them. Each group agreed to: select a recorder; select a facilitator; brainstorm; strategize and discuss; prioritize and report back.

The following is a summary of the points raised by each group.

Group 1

There are a lot of steps to take beginning with a definition of literacy, family literacy, and literacies.

Get together with our partners or potential partners in our communities to identify what resources and programs we already have and what we still need.

Communicate with each other about funding sources. Apparently there's new federal money for programs that community groups can access and some of our group didn't know about it. Funding, generally, is a problem. All or most of the funding goes to K – 12 and national child money goes to Family Resource Centres. Local groups should have a say in where the money goes.

Support families to make the connection between literacy and child development; this support should be community-based. Support emerging community groups and individuals interested in family literacy.

Determine if programs doing similar things should be combined. To do that we need to bring health, education, community, and grassroots organizations together for discussion and to form partnerships.

Lobby government to make a commitment to sustainable adult basic literacy funding. Funders should consider more than one model of program delivery, for example, community-based provision and literacy in the home.

Identify and reduce barriers that people have to programs. For example, promote awareness of our programs through other than the print media.

Group 2

Create a provincial Website, a place to put the good ideas and things that are working in different places.

Ask the steering committee of this conference to create a lobbying letter to politicians and distribute this letter province-wide so that everyone mails, faxes, or emails a copy of it to every politician that exists. This should be started now.

We need more networking. One approach could be an amalgamation of local services.

This conference should be a regularly scheduled event. Networking should be part of the schedule rather than "on the side". Be more descriptive of the workshops and sessions that are offered. We would like to see more displays and have more display time.

The Department of Education should provide more support in the schools earlier on.

We need more viable ways of delivering literacy programs. This is a government and community issue.

We need a provincial promotion/awareness campaign on the importance of family literacy but rather than have a 1-800 number, provide local contact names and numbers.

We would like a report of the conference.

We need a provincial needs survey and it could be called a "wants" survey too.

We need to simplify the money chase. The job is twice as hard as it needs to be.

Group 3

Create an umbrella group for all that's going on. Possible name: The Family Learning Alliance. Keep the word literacy out of it because it has negative connotations for some people. The group was not sure if funders, agencies, and Department officials should be included in this alliance or if it should be kept at the grass roots level.

We should look for corporate funding as well as public funding.

We need to keep the momentum going and we need to keep on the same side and make sure we're talking about the same thing.

New people coming into the movement are not always sure what the expectations are in their jobs and/or roles. We need guidance from people already involved in family literacy. We all need support to stay active participants.

A big next step is public awareness. We need to get the powerful information we received from this conference out to the general public.

Keep this going. Perhaps an executive of the steering committee would volunteer to keep this going.

Group 4

Create a database that includes a map so that it is visually clear where the gaps are in programs around the province.

We need a directory of literacy programs.

Get the information we received from this conference out into the communities. Don't drop the ball.

Build an alliance and lobby politicians to fund more literacy programs at the community level.

Create an inventory of human resources already available in each community and reach out to these people.

Bring a strong message to government and the public about what is going on in family literacy. We need to spread the word and keep it simple so that officials can't say they didn't have time to read it.

Have an annual gathering, not necessarily a conference, and include families, children, and front line people.

Make sure the male gender is better represented next time.

Plenary

The group tried to reach consensus on what ideas would be worked on first and who would take responsibility for which piece. The steering committee of the conference clarified their role as bringing the conference to fruition -- follow up is not part of that.

A new steering committee will be established to create a three-year plan and bring this plan to next year's conference. People interested in serving on this committee, or suggesting someone to serve on this committee, should contact the Literacy Development Council at 1-800-563-1111.

Conference Evaluation

Participants were asked to do an overall evaluation of the conference. They rated 9 aspects of the conference on a scale of 1 - 5 and provided comments in three other areas (strengths of conference; suggestions for change; and what you will take away from the conference). Evaluations were also completed in each workshop. Following is the results of the ratings plus a compendium of comments from participants.

Ratings (Scale of 1-5 with 1=poor and 5=excellent)

1. Roots of Empathy	4.8
2. Keynote Address (Mary Gordon)	4.8
3. Keynote Address (Liz Hanson)	4.5
4. Interactive Plenary	4.3
5. Closing Plenary	3.7
6. Workshop Choices	4.3
7. Organization of Conference	4.7
8. Facilities and Service	4.4
9. Overall Experience	4.7

Strengths of Conference: (Key Words: sharing information, networking, discussion, socialization, keynote speakers, variety of workshops, variety of people and topics.)

I gathered a lot of information from others that I feel myself and others will be able to take back and use in other parts of the province.

Choice of Mary Gordon and Liz Hanson as keynote speakers. Break-out sessions were valuable.

Bringing together so many voices and allowing time for people to network.

Literacy starts in the family. Anyone who has a role in a child's life has a chance to impact on that child.

Great mix of people. I liked the diversity of backgrounds and the opportunity to hear others speak about their concerns and what they were doing.

Bringing groups and representatives together from around the province.

Learned a lot about family literacy and the many literacy programs. Met lots of interesting people.

Very unthreatening. Personal needs were taken into consideration.

Mary Gordon was a powerful speaker with a seductive message. If $19,000.00 is a little steep then let me suggest that there is no copyright on empathy, no copyright on good ideas.

I really enjoyed the Early Brain Development workshop; it was the best of the three that I attended.

Attention to detail and a great variety. The pace was good; the organization and facilities were superb.

Lots of different people involved in the field had the chance to meet.

Roots of Empathy presentation was a great jumpstart for the conference. It's nice to get together at such a conference and gather voices to help our children succeed.

Suggestions for Change:

Mary Gordon should also have had a workshop, would give everyone a better chance to ask questions.

Set up centres around the city for conference sites and allow people to move from one to the other. Set up schools as sites also. Don't give away bags; give me the money to buy books for children instead.

Scheduled time to address the huge issue of core funding, with the people who make the decision.

More people from formal structures to attend and truly listen and be open to change.

More discussion groups. More contacts after conference. People need to know who, how and where to contact to get things moving in communities.

I would like to have seen more parents invited, who are not in the educational field.

Use the "Open Space" concept for workshops. No more kit bags; use the funds to donate to a program.

Some sessions could have been open to the whole group eg. The Strategic Literacy plan and proposal writing, with the booklets available.

I would like to see Federal and Provincial policy makers here. I would also like to see more parents as a voice.

Reorganize the Dept. of Education to reflect the educational needs of the citizens, rather than to perpetuate the system.

Authors, books and software displays.

More displays available for a longer period of time.

A conference with an adult literacy perspective and concentration. More media coverage of these events.

More time to question the keynote speakers.

Rather than concurrent sessions have information sessions so that all can have equal access to them. Leave comments and questions to the interactive plenary.

Include more people from the target groups: the learners, youth, preschool workers, moms. Include other sectors: writers, business people.

More interactive sessions would be beneficial.

Site was not good for accommodations. Rooms were not all adequate in terms of comfort and convenience.

A provincial advocacy group with executive? Are there too many groups trying to achieve the same thing; should there be a spearhead group? Is there one?

Have the conference in a kid's atmosphere; schools would be a good location.

What will you take away from the conference? (Keywords: information, contacts, networking, understanding, ideas, practices)

Ideas, information and networks that will benefit me in future projects.

A full head of new valuable information. I did not know that so much was going on in the province.

Cards of the new people that I've met. How to encourage more dads to become actively involved. New sources of research.

The increased need to work more closely with other groups.

Good ideas and positive feelings that things are really advancing from rhetoric to action with response to early intervention and prevention to combat our serious illiteracy problem.

This conference has really helped me as a mom. I have learned a lot in the past couple of days.

Greater familiarity with individuals and groups working in the field. Understanding that we are not alone in our frustration about fundraising. Some useful connections made. Inspiration to persist.

An energy to continue with the literacy program I'm involved with. A vigour to find out more about the literacy programs on the go and how I can incorporate and modify sections of these to compliment the work in which my group is involved.

The belief that it can still happen.

New enthusiam for the work ahead. A determination to increase partnerships in the community to better utilize our resources.

There was a lot of information that I will use in my own family but I would also like to become an active participant in helping other people benefit from the knowledge I received.

I am motivated to prepare "Storysacks" for age 4 – 6 years.

Provincial perspective, new contacts and information, empathy. There are others who are frustrated about funding as I am, but most importantly there are others having success stories and feeling good about what they do, as I do.

Very interested in facilitating a parent program in Central Newfoundland. Gained much useful information at this conference.

A lot of ideas to bring back to the Francophone community.

Memories of a spirit of generosity, kindness and dedication to a cause. In unity there is strength.

I have met many people in the field. I have extended and accepted invitations for partnerships. I have seen different perspectives of family literacy.

Workshop Evaluations

A1 Extending Families

Too short a time period for five different presenters to give details of their projects.

Everybody has so much to offer our children, whether by talking, singing, reading, helping, teaching and most of all by loving. This is a great gift that every child should experience and without these things the child may feel insecure and inadequate, so hopefully working together we can solve all of their problems and that every child feel this love and hope like all children should.

I really enjoyed hearing about the different projects and I would like to get further information on facilitating some of these projects in the Central Newfoundland. Needed more time to ask questions..

I especially liked the Grandparents as Teaching Partners presentation. It was new to me and seemed to be one that could work anywhere. PRINTS by Dr. Bill Fagan was also super. I would like to do more on this.

So many wonderful programs, initiatives and general passion for children's auccess.

A2 Supporting Family Literacy through Community Based Programs

Really great programs. Love to see more of these in smaller towns.

I had hoped for more information on actual literacy programs.

Very interesting and beautiful HeadStart program .

A handout on the slides presented would have been useful.

The use of visual aids helpful.

A3 Words to Live By: The Strategic Literacy Plan

Schools need funding for resources in every classroom, not on a per school basis.

I was very pleased with the discussion of ABE Level I, and personally I find it is very important we continue to support ABE Level I programs on a community basis in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. Family literacy works easier when mom and dad can read to their child.

Most interesting interactive portion. More important – examples of implementation

I find it interesting that funding is provided for both ends of the literacy continuim (early, adult) but there is a desperate need for funding of materials for during the developmental years of the school age child. Remedial Units for the child below grade level (a great number) and Guided Reading materials for daily instruction are the weakest links in this process. Please look at these components.

I applaud the concept of a provincial strategic plan. There are many things happening throughout the province and we need to be able to connect and motivate. Also, I'm uncertain if we've given enough room to the Early Childhood factor – the pre-literacy development needs, so we don't have to do so much remediation.

I am encouraged that a Literacy Plan has finally been developed, with a view to follow-up and implementation of initiatives. Let's hope it is not "just another plan".

Great job sharing the information. To the organizers: having the presenter do the presentation and keeping up with questions from the audience is very challenging.

The presenter seemed very informed on the topic and I hope many of these things become reality in the near future.

I would like to discuss further the collaboration between Education and Health as a means to advance the goals of the literacy plan.

A4 Early Brain Development and Literacy

I'm an Early Childhood Educator who works at a Family Resource Centre. This session actually reinforced a lot of what I already knew. It was nice to be refreshed.

This was a very informative workshop and exceeded my expectations

Much of the information was a review of things that I already knew and do, yet we should never underestimate the importance of reviewing and reminding. Therefore I really enjoyed the session.

Great job in drawing out the crowd and getting them to participate.

Thanks for the handouts.

B1 Early Intervention and the Role of the Reading Specialist

Excellent session. I didn't expect it to be so good.

Keep listening to the children's dreams.

I'm still unclear about the Reading Specialist position.

Excellent interactive session.

B2 Overcoming Barriers through Innovative Literacy Practices

Very informative. Easy listening. A pleasure to attend.

It renewed my energy and enthusiasm for continuing the work of bringing literacy and the love of learning to others.

I especially enjoyed Ed because I work with the youth at our Community Centre.

I was very interested in what Barb had to say and the approaches they have taken with literacy projects in their area.

It was a lot more than I expected. There was a lot of life experience knowledge.

B3 Reading – A Family Affair

The workshop reiterated information I already knew – good refresher. Would have enjoyed more group work. Enjoyed seeing some new books.

The workshop was more than I expected. It was informative, funny and very interesting.

Thanks for presenting such an enjoyable, interactive, learning experience. Don't change a thing.

The presenter brought in children's books which really added to the content of the workshop.

Not what I expected. I expected details and breakdown on how the family affects a child and their future literacy abilities.

I enjoyed this session very much and really learned a lot from the presenter and the participants.

I thought it was interesting and entertaining. I had fun as well as learned something.

B4 Strategic Literacy Funding

Good informative workshop. We need to lobby government for Level I Adult Learners. Foundations need to be built for learners to go to ABE Level II. Core funding needs to be mandatory.

We need to raise the issue of illiteracy to the top of the government's agenda. How to do this is the question.

Information presented will be helpful.

The issue of ongoing funding, which I consider to be a huge issue was raised. This needs to be raised until it is addressed. We don't need to come up with a new angle every time

we apply for funding. We need to focus on developing what we know works. Far too much energy is spent simply trying to survive. What a waste when there are so many good ideas, demonstrated to be effective, to draw on now.

I was hoping to hear that funding is available to deliver literacy programs. This is a must. $300,000. provincial dollars won't even scratch the paint on literacy development, especially in rural Newfoundland.

There was a lot of information presented on proposal writing; it was impossible to take notes on everything. I would like to have a handout of all the material presented.

C1 National Adult Literacy Database (NALD)

Can't wait to get online.

Good job despite the technology failure.

Excellent presentation. You covered so much. I thought I knew all or more of the NALD site, but it has a lot of information I wasn't aware of.

It was a great learning experience for myself as a field worker dealing with family literacy on a daily basis.

C2 Building Community Capacity through Intergenerational Learning

Good to hear different approaches, discussion of work over a long period of time.

I learned through the sharing of stories. It was wonderful.

This workshop demonstrated that community capacity building is alive and these two people live it, believe it and love it.

Excellent workshop. Agnes Pike is a great motivational speaker, as is Bev Kirby. If only more rural communities had people like "Agnes Pike". Best workshop I attended.

This workshop was interesting and informative and I will be carrying away a lot of knowledge that I will use to educate someone else.

Excellent. Best workshop in the conference. It takes people who have been there to share and empower.

Both speakers instilled motivating messages. In hindsight, maybe a speaker's corner with government reps (MHAs, ADMs) to hear the voices that were gathered here, could have

provided space for them to hear and hopefully to be touched by the voices from community. Thanks for sharing your wealth of experience and knowledge.

There is no rating that could be given for the passion, knowledge and understanding the presenters feel for the topic.

C3 Parent Involvement in Life Long Learning

Last 15 minutes were very good, more practical. There should have been more of this. We need strategies and ways to implement.

It was not what I expected but very good and useful. As always I wish we had more time for practical interaction on the subject and to pass on our ideas on the subject that could help others.

I had a narrow view of what was to be included in the session but it opened my eyes. Would like to have heard more from Rod on what he is doing.

More time is needed for group discussion. Excellent workshop. Adopt an Elder – what a good idea. Wish list: wish it was a longer workshop.

Rod certainly gave me a lot to think about – pride in my heritage. He evoked many emotions in me to go out and seek the stories that my family can contribute to my life and memories that I had forgotten.

Carol Ann was a very friendly presenter who was able to get each member of the audience to participate by sharing his/her ideas. Rod, thanks for your suggestions on how to get grandparents involved.

C4 Factors Underlying Successful Family Literacy Programs

I was impressed by the video modeling and the contributions made by the mother who had learned from the program and was now teaching her husband.

Something I would definitely like to be involved in.

I didn't realize that it would be about one program and why it is successful. I was looking for a general overview of the qualities of successful programs. I did think it was good to have three presenters with different perspectives.

Great presentation. Real people, parents and communities.

I thought it would be more research oriented but it was very practical. This is a plus, not a criticism. I was very impressed with the knowledge and articulation of the literacy development process. Inspiring.

Publications

Little Steps: Path to Lifelong Learning (12-page booklet)
a booklet designed to encourage and inform parents and other caregivers on ways to bring literacy into everyday life

Family Literacy Programs in Newfoundland and Labrador (4-fold brochure)
a listing and brief description of established formal and informal family literacy programs in Newfoundland and Labrador

Released at the
Gathering Voices Conference
Battery Hotel, October 2000

Following a competitive bid situation, in June of 2000, Kim Todd was awarded a contract to produce two publications for the Family Literacy Alliance Steering Committee. Work began in July of 2000, and the publications were delivered on site in October. Distribution took place throughout the month of November. (List attached). The publication was very well-received, and demand for copies continues.

Work included:
Research - reading materials on, and interviewing Committee members as well as others knowledgeable in the field of family literacy
Development - developing a design concept and theme for the publications
Writing - content in an approachable, easy-to-read and meaningful style
Editing - in conjunction with committee members
Photography - arranging subjects, shoots and photography for inclusion, permission for same and/or the use of photographs already in existence
Design & Layout - of the brochures in an attractive and eye-catching design
Print Management - coordination with printer for quality job at reasonable price
Distribution - of 14,000 copies of each of the publications

Distribution List

There were 14,000 copies of each printed and distributed.

Eastern

Literacy Development Council of Newfoundland and Labrador
Literacy Unit, Department of Education
Newfoundland and Labrador Women's Institute, St. John's
Community Based Assessment Remedial, St. John's
NF Parent-Child Mother Goose, St. John's
Two Sites Community Centre, Marystown
Burin Peninsula Laubach Literacy Council
Brighter Futures, Marystown
Burin Peninsula School Board
Brighter Futures Coalition, St. John's
Froude Avenue Community Centre, St. John's
MacMorran Community Centre, St. John's
Kilbride to Ferryland Family Resource Centre, Goulds
YMCA-YWCA, St. John's
Community Services Council, St. John's
Provincial Association Against Family Violence, St. John's
Provincial Association of Childcare Administrators, Topsail
Trinity Conception Family Resource Centre, Carbonear
Virginia Park Community Centre, St. John's
Buckmaster's Circle Community Centre, St. John's
Rabbittown Community Centre, St. John's
PRINTS, St. Joseph's, Salmonier
Nourishing Foundations for Literacy Development, Bay Roberts
Vista Family Resource Centre, Bonavista
Bonavista Area Literacy Group, Bonavista
Avalon East School Board, St. John's

Central

Laubach Literacy Council, Gander
Bonne Bay Academy, Woody Point
Central/Eastern Literacy Outreach, Gander
Fogo Island Literacy Association, Fogo
Exploits Laubach Literacy Council,Grand Falls-Windsor
Baie Verte Peninsula Literacy Outreach, Baie Verte
Riverwood Academy, Kings Point

West

Books for Babies, Corner Brook
Deer Lake Community Learning Centre, Deer Lake
Laubach Literacy of Canada, Corner Brook
Northern Peninsula/Labrador Straits Family Resource Centre Inc., St. Anthony
Cormack Trail School Board, Stephenville
Hare Bay - Dover Family Resource Centre, Dover
Community Education Network of Southwestern NF
Port aux Basques, c/o Raymond Bown
Ramea, c/o Maxine Stewart/Ann Margaret Scott
Tree House Family Resource Centre, Deer Lake
School District #3, Corner Brook

Labrador

LLIAN, Happy Valley-Goose Bay
College of the North Atlantic, Labrador City
Partners in Learning, West St. Modeste
Labrador White Bay Area Literacy Outreach, Port Hope Simpson
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